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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002622

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: OFFICIALS EXTREMELY ALARMED, ON MESSAGE

REF: ANKARA 2620

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, for Reasons 1.4 (b),d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. High-level officials from the ruling party and government bureaucracy are delivering the same anxious message: the Turkish people are on the verge of slipping beyond the government's control. Anger stoked by a series of vicious attacks by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has reached the boiling point with the deaths in Hakkari province of 12 soldiers on Sunday. Two reliable Embassy contacts, Saban Disli, Vice Chair of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), and Yunus Emre Karaosmanoglu, Prime Minister Erdogan's deputy chief of staff, are among those warning us that: public reaction is in danger of spinning out of control; the government prefers not to conduct a cross-border operation (CBO) but may be compelled to do so; and the US's window for concrete action -- and not just words -- is closing fast. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Our contacts have expressed genuine alarm over the escalating public reaction to recent PKK attacks as both a source of pressure on the government and a potential seam splitter in society. Disli believes the public is genuinely, spontaneously, enraged and demands some concrete response; he and Karaosmanoglu both fear the possibility of lynch mobs targeting Kurdish citizens (reftel). Karaosmanoglu noted that demonstrators are marching into Kurdish neighborhoods or to pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) provincial headquarters in Erzurum and Istanbul and suggested that they could easily find the trouble they are looking for.

13. (C) AKP deputy Reha Camuroglu, a rare Alevi in the party, nearly in tears told DCM that all his hopes and dreams for a democratic Turkey now hang in the balance. He passionately pointed to public calls for a state of emergency, and to citizens willingly ceding democracy in the name of security. He underscored how quickly the public's fury could snowball out of control. Camuroglu stressed that all other issues -- democracy, religious minorities, reforms -- are now held hostage to the PKK issue. All three agreed that anger on this scale cannot be contained indefinitely. Tension is so high right now that just a spark could trigger something big. Disli asked, "We know it's a trap (by the PKK), but how long can we hold this off?"

14. (C) Statements by President Bush, the Secretary,

Department of State, and Ambassador were timely and helped reduce tensions, Disli said. But tensions remain extremely high; much will be decided in the lead-up to the October 24 (14:00) National Security Council meeting, chaired by President Gul. Given the intense pressure, Turkey could afford to give Secretary Rice "no more than one week" grace period, as requested in her phone call with PM Erdogan, according to Karaosmanoglu. At that point, he said, the US must either go in with Turkey, or go in alone. "We are not pushing to do this ourselves," he stated, "but we must see the expulsion of the PKK." He reminded that when the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers triggered war in 2006, Secretary Rice had said that Israel was in the right. "Now

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we have our own kidnapped soldiers, and we are right." He said that the US needs to compel "Barzani and Talabani" to shut down the transport routes by which money and weapons are reaching the PKK.

15. (C) Disli added that Kurdistan Regional Government head Barzani has to do something tangible, such as handing over a PKK terrorist involved in organizing the Turkish attacks. CHP MP Baykurt told us the US needs to choose between Turkey and northern Iraq; allowing Massoud Barzani and others to make inflammatory statements aggravates an already tense situation. AKP MP Akbulut said the US has two golden opportunities to reverse intense anti-Americanism in Turkey: one is to prevent passage of the Armenia genocide resolution and the other is to exert more pressure on Iraqi Kurdish leaders to take concrete steps against the PKK, including extraditing PKK leaders.

16. (C) The consequence of US inaction is a unilateral cross-border operation, Karaosmanoglu indicated, but contacts

ANKARA 00002622 002 OF 002

differ on what would come next. Karaosmanoglu claims the military goal would be clearing out all of the PKK camps in northern Iraq. Disli fears that "if we free the hands of the military," their actions might prove broader than planned. The government may say the PKK is the only target, but there is so much anger at Barzani now that there is no guarantee that they won't go further. And if the Turks cross the border, there is no guarantee the mission will be brief; they may stay. Both men emphasized that regardless of obstacles like terrain or lack of support, the Turkish military, which feels it has lost face, is a fighting force with which to be reckoned.

17. (C) The government's first choice remains not to conduct a CBO, contacts agreed. Habur Gate, Disli pointed out, is key to the southeastern economy. When the public calls for its closure, it will not just affect Iraq, but the livelihood of many southeastern truckers. AKP has invested more in the southeast than any previous government; soon there will be charges that the government is paving roads and providing water for the PKK. Southeastern MPs were reluctant to vote for the CBO, but did so in the end because of the attacks and because they are hoping for a quick, clean operation.

18. (C) AKP MP and Vice Chair Edibe Sozen said the government is consulting with neighbors and seeking international support. Officials are fanning out to explain Turkey's position and discuss possible responses to PKK provocations. PM Erdogan's October 22-23 visit to London was scheduled to include a side meeting with Israeli PM Olmert, and FM Babacan was in Baghdad October 23, talking directly to Iraqi officials. Disli said the government's recent efforts to improve relations with Iraq are a major reason the government is hesitating to launch a CBO; Turkey does not want to ruin the new and delicate equilibrium and start a possible domino effect in the region. Disli opined that the EU won't do anything. In the end, however, if there is a CBO, they believe the international community will understand: they

have been more than patient, President Gul has reached out to all parties (even to what the public considers to be the PKK-in-parliament, the DTP), and they have the international legitimacy of a threat emanating from across the border.

19. (C) COMMENT. The messages conveyed by this handful of contacts are striking for their harmony, namely that the public's vociferous reaction and the potential for social violence demands that Turkey see some concrete action -- and not "just words" -- whether the US helps them or not. This is not merely hiding behind the public; the government has worked consistently to calm the waters on this issue.
END COMMENT.

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